

13 SECRET STO RM

"ALL THE SECRET PLACES"

BY

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It had been a rotten war. And as always, worse for some than others. Sgt Ward Brady felt himself among the former. He would never voice it aloud but he knew that somehow, in the vast blundering bureaucracy of the Army, his outfit was one of those which had been called upon to do more than its share.

It had gotten down to a race of which ^{Ward's} give out first. The war itself or Brady's capacity to endure. His Texas outfit was one of the most decorated in the army, and one of the most decimated.

Now, the war was almost done and Brady had had enough. Enough of dying and brutality..enough of service to the cause. He had done all they had asked..given whatever they wanted. It was time now to get back to his own life.

In that life, having been given nothing..he had expected nothing. But he had worked to make a place for himself. Quietly and without complaint. Now, there was land that was his.

Brady wanted to go home. Waited for the day. He had earned it.

But as our story opens, Brady's platoon has had its leave orders temporarily revoked. Instead, he and his men are ordered to search out dishard enemy elements caught behind American lines.

A patrol reports sounds of activity inside a supposedly abandoned munitions tunnel. Surrounding it, Brady orders those inside to surrender. There is no reply. He fires a burst...and a young voice cries out..."please don't shoot... no more."

Out of the tunnel, come the "enemy." Ten children. Hands upraised. Dirty, half starved. And on the clothes of each, the Star of David. Burned into the arms of each...the numbers of the concentration camps

One boy speaks for them. Yuri, thirteen. His is an unmistakable authority. He has faced much...and managed to stay alive. It was this small, impassive faced boy who had led the others from the bombed cattle train and who had kept them alive ever since by foraging the countryside.

For Brady and the other Texas soldiers, it is their first view of Belsen survivors. At once, Brady orders food to be given and the children fall on the rations like starving wolves. It is Yuri's sharp command which brings some semblance of order.

Brady tries to reassure Yuri. They've nothing to be frightened of anymore. They are safe now. But the boy is suspicious. What adult is to be trusted?

These soldiers have seen much but they react to the stories of Yuri and the children. A childhood of hiding in ghettos, down in sewers, jumping trains, dodging S.S. guards. Then...their time in the camps. The shootings, beatings, cremations. Their competition in matching horror for horror is matter of fact

and as compelling as the stories themselves.

As Brady has recognized the leadership in Yuri, so has the boy seen it in the Sergeant and it is the older man with whom he "negotiates" on behalf of his friends. Despite the age difference, these two strong personalities seem almost equal. And Yuri accepts Brady's promise that they will be cared for.

The following morning, a Red Cross worker arrives to take the children back to a refugee camp. When Brady goes for Yuri, he and the others are gone.

It is no simple matter to track them down. Yuri is too well used to the role of hunted animal to be caught so easily. But inadvertently, he blunders into an area where German soldiers are hiding.

Brady and his platoon have to risk much to save them. But Yuri has no sense of being under obligation. In his view, Brady is just trying to make up for having betrayed them, for he had lied to them, like all the others. The Sergeant had said he would take care of them but instead he was turning them over to a camp.

Brady tries to explain it is a different kind of camp but Yuri is silent, his eyes dead. Unable to get through, Brady's frustration mounts until angrily, he denies that he lied. Yuri and his friends will be cared for.

"Prove it," Yuri challenges.

"How," Brady demands.

The reply is fired back, "Take us to America."

After Brady recovers, his arguments spill out.

"How can I take tenkids to America? There are laws. It's impossible. They wouldn't let me. It's wild."

As before, the arguments and protests fall on deaf ears.

That night, Yuri and his friends sing a song of the concentration camps. A song which chills Brady and the soldiers. Brady orders the children to stop but as they do, he feels instantly guilty. And Yuri takes up the song again..staring at Brady. They are children of our time and they will use whatever they can as a weapon..Including pity. There are no holds barred... in Yuri's determination to lead his flock to the promised land of America.

For Brady, the last things he wants or needs is this burden which has suddenly come upon him. But he cannot turn aside from Yuri's accusation that to turn them over to the refugee camp is just to get rid of them. To let someone else do it..though he doesn't really know if someone else will.

It would be simpler not to get involved. The malaise of our century. But as his platoon talks about these Belsen children..he does not silence his men. They talk that these kids aren't kids at all..They'll/never trust anyone again...putting them in a camp is criminal...someone has to help Yuri and the others.

Brady suddenly roars at them. "All right! You want to put these kids back together again? Then let's take them to America."

The journey begins. And it is the wildest, most incredible smuggling expedition ever recorded.

The obstacles seem insuperable. But one after another is managed. Even a Catholic chaplain is involved as he rallies many of his colleagues to smuggle the children nearer and nearer the French coast.

Yuri, who still refuses to remove his Star of David, recognizes the wisdom of his temporary impersonation of an altar boy..at the chaplain's suggestion.

Even the female Red Cross worker, who becomes suspicious of Brady, is rung in on the plan.

Through it all, we see the growing development of the boy and the man, as diverse in background as any two could possibly be.

Yuri refuses to give himself to Brady. He refuses to permit himself an attachment. And for Brady himself, the mission becomes all because he knows the consequences to Yuri and the children, if he fails.

It is only after the children are successfully smuggled into America and turned over to a Hebrew Immigrant Agency, that Brady learns there was more to his determination. Much more.

The journey to America has been a personal struggle between Brady and Yuri. The latter a constant challenge to Brady that a man ^{can not} ~~is to~~ be trusted. And Brady determined to prove it so.

But when Brady prepares to say his last farewell to Yuri at the Agency's offices, the boy must find some way to let Brady know that he has done more than won his case. He must somehow let the older man know that he loves him. And so, for the first time, he removes the Star of David from his clothing.

For Brady, who has allowed little affection in his life, he can only accept this act as an admission that the boy has his faith back. And this is what he had promised himself to do.

It is only when the door has closed behind Brady, that we see Yuri do something we had come to believe him incapable of. He weeps.

Home again, in the southwest, Brady tries to pick up his life again. But the memory of the proud little boy stays with him. And it is now that he begins to learn that his involvement had been more than with just principle. He had become involved with the life of another human being.

There are many legends in Texas. One of the true ones is of the Texas sergeant and his platoon who got their Congressmen to pass a law making them fathers of ten new citizens of Texas.

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He returns for Yuri. If he could talk